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Nancy H. Traill

Fictional Worlds of the Fantastic

The fantastic has long had a curious appeal for the imagination. In the eighteenth century, it engaged the attention of theorists, who became quite fond of arguing over the desirability and appropriateness of "the marvellous" in literature. Before Breitinger formulated his typology, modeled on Leibniz's theory of possible worlds, the marvellous was dismissed as "the fairy way of writing," as a violation of the norm of imitating reality.[1] Some nineteenth-century critics, and certainly authors of fantastic fiction, were more generous, but it was only in the twentieth century that the normative ground was once and for all abandoned. Theorists became concerned with describing features specific to the fantastic and with distinguishing it from other forms of literature. Against the background of four of these twentieth-century approaches, I will propose a typology of the fantastic using the concepts of possible-worlds semantics.

1. Conceptions of the Fantastic

In the thematic approach, the critic catalogues recurrent fantastic themes and motifs (divinities, ghosts, werewolves, vampires) and their various transformations. Dorothy Scarborough, for instance, noted that the motif of divinities was frequent in early religious plays and contrasted them with the spectral nightwalkers of eighteenth-century Gothic romances (285). However, the apparent haphazardness of the thematic approach leads even its proponents to recognize inherent problems. Scarborough had to acknowledge that transformations introduce a historical dimension and that even the theme of the ghost could be broken down into types and subtypes (82). Other critics transcended heteronymous thematic categories by pointing to a universal psychological factor: fear (see especially Vax and Penzoldt). For Penzoldt, the effect of supernatural stories on the reader follows a gradation, "an ascending line leading up to the climax" (16). Though this is a general plot pattern not restricted to the fantastic, Penzoldt also observes that "the position and exceptional importance of the climax" distinguishes the ghost story from other kinds of the short story (16). Still others have singled out the intrusion of the strange or unreal into reality (Caillois, Castex).

Tzvetan Todorov's well-known and influential book *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* was a major step towards a text-centered and semanti-

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costructural study of the fantastic. He established an ideal model, an invariant that he called the pure fantastic. Ambiguity is requisite as part of the work's structure rather than as a theme and must cause the implicit reader to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation for the narrated events. Hesitation may become a theme if dramatized in the text: that is, if the protagonist shares the reader's hesitation.[2] Texts that do not fulfill these requirements belong to one of two "neighboring genres," the uncanny or the marvellous. Todorov's restrictive and exclusive model was a narrow conception of the fantastic, which later theorists tried to complement with ideological, pragmatic, and contextual factors.

The contextual approach of Irene Bessière, Christine Brooke-Rose, and Rosemary Jackson sees the fantastic as a challenge to empirical reality. For Bessière, the fantastic lies on the boundary between "thetic" narratives ("romans des réalia") and "non-thetic"[3] narratives ("conte de fée"). Nonthetic narratives (the marvellous) use the "unreal" to demonstrate norms (historically bound beliefs and ideologies), expressing absolute values through universals such as good and evil. By contrast, the events of a fantastic narrative are a catalyst for questioning the validity of norms. For Brooke-Rose, too, the fantastic undermines the standard conception of reality (4), while Jackson takes her pragmatics of the fantastic a step further, suggesting that it expresses a desire for the taboo or the absent (3, 41, 173-74).

I propose a return to the semanticostructural approach, with two conditions: first, recognition of the links between the literary fantastic and the extraliterary context and intertext; second, replacing Todorov's narrow conception with a theory capable of accounting for the universal and variable features of the fantastic in literature and beyond.

The fantastic is a broad aesthetic category. It appears, after all, in various "media": in the visual arts, in literature, in music. Ideally, a theory of the fantastic would cover the entire aesthetic range (not to mention religion, philosophy, etc.). My concern here is only with the literary fantastic, but the broader aesthetic view lends support to a basic contention: the fantastic is constituted by the confrontation and interplay within the fictional world of two alethically contrastive domains, the supernatural and the natural.[4] For this reason, the literary fantastic is not a genre in its own right: it cuts across established genres, surfacing as short story, drama, novel, epos, ballad, and so on. It appears as well in such different period styles as romanticism, realism, and surrealism, to name only three.

Todorov argued that the supernatural-natural opposition is not the common denominator of the fantastic: it would force us to call fantastic every work where there is a supernatural event, an inclusiveness unproductive for a theory. His objection is a logical consequence of his generic approach: any work in which the postulated genre feature is observed must be included in the genre. In that case, can we call *Hamlet* fantastic because the ghost of

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Hamlet's father makes an appearance? Under a generic approach—that is, if the presence of a supernatural event is taken as the defining criterion of the fantastic—the answer is yes. Under Todorov's specific criterion of "reader hesitation," *Hamlet* is not fantastic. Nonetheless, what Todorov's "reader hesitation" boils down to on analysis is the opposition between the supernatural and the natural: "il faut que le texte oblige le lecteur à considérer le monde des personnages comme un monde de personnes vivantes et à hésiter entre *une explication naturelle et une explication surnaturelle* des événements évoqués" (Todorov, *Introduction* 37; emphasis added) ("the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described") (Todorov, *Fantastic* 19). Todorov cannot avoid the natural-supernatural opposition, but pushes it out of theoretical consideration.

2. The Possible-Worlds Framework

The ghost of Hamlet's father does not "melt, thaw, and dissolve itself" so easily. As a theoretical problem, it disappears only if the theory of the literary fantastic is placed on a macrostructural foundation. The concept of fictional world provides such a grounding, allowing us to determine whether a supernatural constituent is central or peripheral, functional or auxiliary, dominant or subordinate. In this framework, the concept of the fantastic is not derived from individual, isolated incidents or episodes; it is based on the global structure of the fictional world, on the interplay of its natural and supernatural domains. As for *Hamlet*, there is a supernatural constituent, but it is no more than a fragment of the fantastic, a peripheral phenomenon that motivates Hamlet's actions and triggers the plot. Such episodes abound in fiction. Brontë's Jane Eyre experiences clairaudience when she hears Rochester calling out to her in pain (*Jane Eyre* [1847]); in Collins's *The Frozen Deep* (1874) Clara in England has a vision of Richard Wardour about to desert Frank Aldersley on their Arctic expedition. By the same token, no one would consider Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) fantastic fiction; yet it contains embedded tales that narrate supernatural events. In these and similar cases, the supernatural is a device with some specific and limited purpose; as Jay Macpherson points out, suspense in *The Frozen Deep* is "greatly heightened by this [Clara's] glimpse" (245). In *Pickwick*, the supernatural is prompted by the pleasure of spinning eerie tales by traditional means of oral storytelling. Interpreted within the framework of possible-worlds semantics, the macrostructural concept of fictional world is a foundation for a comprehensive theory of fictionality in general and for the fantastic in particular.[5]

From this point of view, the natural domain is defined as a physically possible world, one that "has the same natural laws as does the actual world"

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(Bradley and Swartz 6).[6] The supernatural domain, in contrast, is a physically impossible world. The keystone of the fantastic fictional world is thus the opposition between physically possible and physically impossible. From different artistic treatments of this opposition arises a typological variability that, I would suggest, underlies the historical changes seen in the evolution of fantastic literature. Such a theory of the fantastic leads us naturally to a typology of modes.[7]

3. A Typology of the Fantastic

If the fictional world of the fantastic is characterized by the alethic opposition of two domains, it also poses the question of the supernatural domain's fictional existence. The second basis of the typology is qualitative: the existential status of the supernatural as determined by authentication.[8] The concept of mode permits a crossgeneric and transhistorical approach to the fantastic, helping us to decide how one fantastic narrative differs from, or resembles, another.

The Authenticated Mode

The fictional world of the authenticated mode is characterized by the copresence of two modally opposite domains, the natural and the supernatural. Because both domains are fully authenticated, their status is that of uncontested, unambiguous fictional "facts." Supernatural entities inhabit their own separate domain, but their exceptional powers allow them to enter and even exert influence in the natural domain. They may be suprahuman individuals (demons, gods, gnomes, revenants, etc.), or they may be such events as the metamorphosis of an inanimate object into an animate being. Although characters of the natural domain may coexist and interact with them, supernatural entities are still recognized as "alien" to the natural domain. For instance, the supernatural being of Balzac's *Séraphîta* (1835) is an androgynous angel who enters the natural domain where Minna and Wilfrid fall in love with him/her. At the same time, both characters recognize Séraphîta's exceptionality. *Séraphîta*, of course, works a specific philosophical theme; but its fictional world structure, its division into two separate semantic domains, exemplifies the authenticated mode. Gogol's "Viy" (1834-42) and "A Terrible Vengeance" ("Strashnaya mest' ") (1831), Le Sage's *Le diable boiteux* (1709) (and the seventeenth-century Spanish novel on which it is based, Vélez de Guevara's *El diablo cojuelo*) demonstrate the same disjunction of domains as well as the possibility of interaction between supernatural and natural beings.

In this mode, no special motivation is required to account for a supernatural being's entry into the natural domain or a human character's interacting

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with it. Their relations may be of all kinds: in Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), Ambrosio's alliance with Matilda is motivated by a quite natural passion. The fact that his partner is, as Ambrosio learns, a demon and not a woman is irrelevant for the story's structure. Matilda is a fully authenticated supernatural being whose function in the fictional world is to unleash Ambrosio's repressed desires. As a being with supernatural powers, she can assume whatever form is necessary to fulfill that function.

Characteristic of the authenticated mode is that supernatural beings and events cannot be *dis*authenticated: as a domain with full existential status within the world of the work, the supernatural cannot be explained away as dream, hallucination, madness, and so on. Thus, supernatural entities, because they are not naturalized, are never assimilated into the natural domain.

In a subtype of this mode, the supernatural domain is, or becomes, the predominant domain of the fictional world. A natural domain is not constructed at all, or it is constructed merely as a framing device (prologue, epilogue, or both). In Beckford's *Vathek* (1784) the supernatural domain occupies the entire fictional world, and the contrast to the natural domain is established only implicitly. Todorov suggested that the supernatural in *Vathek* is generated by verbal exaggeration: the Indian is described metaphorically as "huddled into a ball," an expression that leads to a metamorphosis of the man into a ball rolled from room to room (37). But the poetic expression, I would stress, can become an event only because the transformation occurs in the world of the supernatural, where it is possible for characters to metamorphose.

Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) uses a framing device. Gulliver is in the natural domain of England when he sets sail from Bristol; when he is shipwrecked, he enters the supernatural domain, swimming aimlessly until he arrives (first) at Lilliput, a land inhabited by supernatural beings. With each new voyage to the supernatural domain, he leaves behind the natural domain, just as in the framing epilogues he leaves behind the supernatural and returns to the natural domain of England.

The Ambiguous Mode

Though many theorists and author-critics consider ambiguity a factor in the fantastic, not all agree with Todorov that it is the only or decisive one. The fantastic, in short, does not hinge upon ambiguity, so that we are entitled to think of the ambiguous mode as one kind in a larger category.

In the ambiguous mode, the supernatural domain seems to be constructed in the fictional world, but the narrator (or protagonist-narrator) does not fully authenticate it. In Todorov's words, the character(s) may or may not hesitate, but the reader must. The governess of James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) never hesitates. Clues are given not only in her discourse, but in Mrs. Grose's, whose version of the incidents apparently contradicts the governess's. For

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Todorov, *The Turn of the Screw* (along with Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille" [1837]) is an ideal instance of the fantastic, of a narrative where ambiguity is unresolved. Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) is such a case as well; as Jackson notes, the confusion of pronouns and pronoun functions prevents the reader from deciding whether Wringhim is consorting with the devil (31). The narrative strategies in Gogol's second version of "The Portrait" ("Portret") (1842) and in the printed version of "The Nose" ("Nos") (1843) also make it impossible to determine whether the supernatural events are motivated by dreams. In the same way, Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades" ("Pikovaya dama") (1833) remains ambiguous. Hermann is confined to a madhouse, but no firm textual evidence points to his being mad until after he sees the dead Countess: in "The Conclusion," the narrator observes in passing, "Hermann went out of his mind." The fictional status of his fateful dream remains indeterminate.

Reader hesitation, to elaborate on the point made earlier, is the result of textual indeterminacy, the failure to authenticate the supernatural. The existential status of the supernatural domain fluctuates and remains unstable to the end. Natural explanations may, however, be tried out—the strange experience was only a dream, a drug-induced illusion, or the by-product of madness, fear, or hysteria—but they are never fully authenticated. By this means, the ambiguous mode adds an epistemic dimension to the alethic distinction that characterizes the preceding modes. Validation of the supernatural domain is made dependent on perception and interpretation.

The Disauthenticated Mode

In this mode, the supernatural domain is constructed, as in the authenticated mode, but ultimately disauthenticated and a natural causation assigned to the events. Yet there is no reason to bar this mode from the fantastic. For one thing, there are sometimes reasons why the explanation itself seems doubtful, as Todorov remarks about Potocki's and Nodier's texts: "De fait, les solutions réalistes que reçoivent le *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (1847) ou *Inès de las Sierras* (1837) sont parfaitement invraisemblables; les solutions surnaturelles auraient été, au contraire, vraisemblables" (51) ("In fact, the realist solutions applied to the *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* [1847] or *Inès de las Sierras* [1837] are perfectly nonverisimilar; the supernatural solutions, on the contrary, would have been verisimilar"). For another, we cannot ignore the narrative strategies that have served throughout to authenticate the supernatural or at the very least to suggest it. Surely a narrative does not cease to be fantastic with the meager statement "he woke up." Ann Radcliffe's novels (with the exception of *Gaston de Blondeville* [1826]) are classic examples of this mode with supernatural events attributed either to human machination or to misunderstanding.

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In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), too, the supernatural is ultimately disauthenticated by Alice's sister's waking her up and by Alice's own admission that she had had a curious dream. The supernatural domain has been constructed, and the fantastic generated, by metaphors' and other poetic devices' becoming events: the March Hare, for instance, is the embodiment of a simile, "mad as a March hare." Alice also must adapt to ontologically alien conditions. She finds that she can gain different perspectives on her surroundings by eating or drinking certain substances that make her either shrink or elongate. In *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), language is arbitrary, and spatial and temporal logic the reverse of that in the natural domain (implicit in Alice's reference to "our country"): running ahead entails never passing the starting point while remembering is an anticipation of the future.

The modes of the fantastic discussed so far—authenticated, ambiguous, and disauthenticated—all treat the supernatural as "otherworldly," as distinct from the natural domain of the fictional world. These structures endured for centuries and flourish even in our own, as the tales of writers like M. R. James and J. R. R. Tolkien bear witness. In the last mode of the fantastic, the paranormal, these time-honored structures give way to a new narrative treatment of the supernatural and a new conception of its relation to the natural.

The Paranormal Mode

The paranormal mode is a radical transformation of the alethic dichotomy of the fantastic. "Supernatural" and "natural" are no longer mutually exclusive. On the contrary, paranormal fictions suggest that the supernatural lies concealed within the natural domain and is just as physically possible. Thus, if phenomena like clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition are not part of a separate (autonomous) domain, they are compatible and coexistent with standard (and natural) human abilities. Where the traditional modes of the fantastic ascribed extraordinary abilities only to supernatural entities, the paranormal mode enlarges the natural domain to include a region accessible to characters with exceptional perceptual capacities. Supernatural phenomena are reinterpreted and brought within the paradigm of the natural: they are latent in nature or innate in people. The laws of the physically possible natural domain are not violated, but supplemented.

In such a way, the strict boundary between the natural and supernatural domains is obscured: a seemingly supernatural event—for example, a character having a precognitive experience—occurs within the natural domain yet resists explanation under accepted concepts of the physically possible. Those characters who do not share the experience may reason that it is a delusion brought on by hallucination, insanity, and so on. But none of these "deviant" mental states is found to motivate the event. Rather, some fundamental assumptions are challenged: so-called insanity may be no other than heightened perception,

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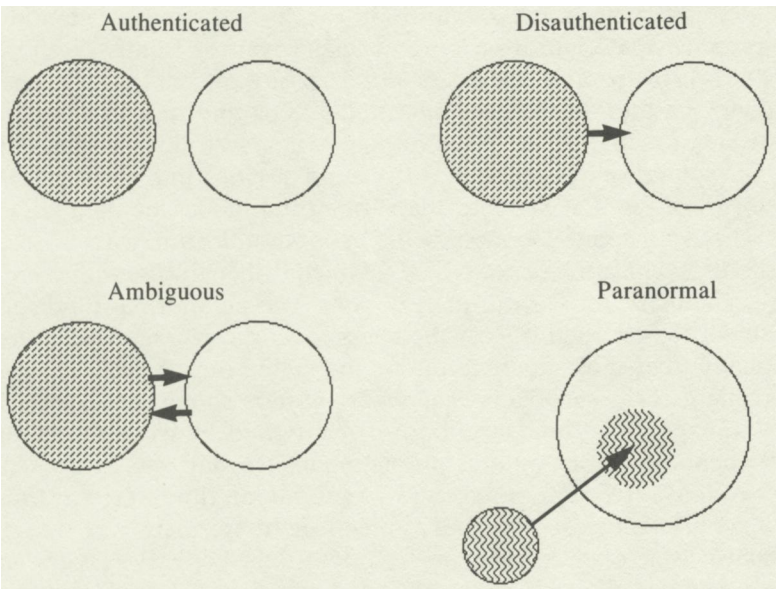
a means of access into the domain of the unknown analogous to the microscope, which gives the scientist access to nature's hidden microworld. In this respect, the paranormal mode, like the ambiguous, makes the alethic dependent on the epistemic. But in the ambiguous mode, as we saw, a dilemma comes of attempting to determine epistemically the supernatural event's alethic status. The paranormal mode, in contrast, lays the problem to rest: the alethic opposition is neutralized because the domain of the physically possible is expanded. All the agential capacities, events, and so forth that appear as supernatural in the fictional worlds of the other modes are integrated into the enlarged natural domain.[9]

The following simple diagrams represent the modes discussed above with their division of the fictional world into natural and supernatural domains. Hatched circles represent the supernatural domain, while arrows indicate the dynamic changes in their existential status (authenticated/disauthenticated). The double arrow of the paranormal mode denotes integration; the enlarged natural domain is shaded to suggest the reinterpretation of supernatural phenomena.

These modes are not pigeonholes for works of literature. They are invariants, or models. Some texts are representative of a single mode; others display features of two or more modes. Maupassant's short story "Apparition" (1883) is a case in point. If the evidence, a strand of hair, is taken to authenticate the supernatural (a revenant), then the story would exemplify the authenticated



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mode; but the text also foregrounds a cognitive problem: is it possible for the human mind to perceive and make contact with a nonmaterial phenomenon in whatever form it presents itself? Such an epistemic strategy is typical of the paranormal mode.

4. The Rise of Paranormal Fiction

It seems reasonable to assume that specific historical conditions have something to do with the genesis and rise of the particular modes. The authenticated mode would appear to have its roots in ancient "mythological" culture and to have been especially well exploited by eighteenth-century authors of Gothic narratives like Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, M. G. Lewis, and Charles Maturin. Ann Radcliffe, perhaps in reaction to this exuberant excess of supernatural horrors, would seem to have initiated the disauthenticated mode. Romanticism, in turn, seems to have fostered the ambiguous mode.

The paranormal mode is linked to modern science's reexamination of the supernatural. The second half of the nineteenth century is commonly seen as a period when positivism dominated the sciences, and realism, literature. Positive science rejected the supernatural outright as a product of superstition or mysticism. But the intellectual climate was more complex than this simplification suggests: many scientists and researchers, aware of the paradox of positive science,[10] attempted to make paranormal phenomena a legitimate object of study; as to popular culture, it was, as Shaw remarked, addicted to "table-rapping, materialization séances, clairvoyance, palmistry and crystal-gazing" (xiv). In the anti- or postpositivist philosophical outlook, the supernatural was naturalized by being interpreted as paranormal: it was ascribed to energies latent in nature or in the human mind, still unknown and awaiting scientific exploration. Here we find the most obvious link between the traditional forms of the fantastic and the paranormal mode: the parallel with spiritism, whose adherents espoused belief in communication with the dead, and its offshoot psychical research, which inclined rather to (pseudo)scientific hypotheses about the mind's dormant powers. The paranormal mode grew out of an analogous restructuring of the fictional world, where mysterious forces traditionally treated as supernatural are integrated into the natural domain.[11]

It might seem surprising that realist writers should apply their imaginations to expanding the conception of reality and to accommodating paranormal phenomena. But we find among them such stalwarts as Dickens, Turgenev, and Maupassant. Each was skeptical of the supernatural in its traditional, mythological sense and as practiced by spiritists. At the same time, these realists were open to other possibilities, to the cognitive experiences that science cannot yet explain and to possible dimensions of reality that transcend

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the standard, narrow conception. Maupassant, chiefly, would go a step further and explore possible repercussions of natural selection: if some faculties are more developed in humans than in other species, then still uncharted faculties might be more developed in other, "higher," species. And if human sensory capabilities are so limited, then there may be phenomena, or indeed species, that humans cannot perceive.

A brief analysis of three stories—Dickens's "The Signal-Man" (1866), Turgenev's "The Dream" ("Son") (1877), and Maupassant's "Le Horla" (1887)—gives us some notion of the different sources of paranormal fiction and of the variability of its fictional world structure.

"The Signal-Man" poses an epistemic problem: is the mysterious event a coincidence, or is there perhaps something behind what is conveniently labeled coincidence? The narrator of "The Signal-Man" is only marginally involved in the narrated events. His main functions are the traditional acts of storytelling: providing a witness's account and mediating those of other characters. But he also takes on the more significant role of authenticating connector: he collects and interprets clues. He forms, evaluates, and changes his hypotheses by comparing and synthesizing information from three independent sources: the signal man's narrative about a specter gesticulating at the mouth of the tunnel (always followed by a train disaster), his private experience of assigning words to the gestures described by the signal man, and the engine driver's report of his own words and gestures when the signal man is accidentally run down. In fusing these sources of information, the narrator applies an epistemic strategy that follows a pattern of gradation. The supernatural is introduced into the fictional world only briefly, in reaction to the signal man's gloomy habitat, through the counterfactual "as if I had left the natural world"; the narrator is not satisfied with this interpretation and pursues a natural explanation. Has the signal man's isolation taken its toll on his mind? Have his senses merely been deceived by the wind and the light? Are the train disasters that follow the specter's warnings merely coincidence?

But just as he rejects the supernatural explanation (after all, only the signal man saw the specter), the narrator is forced to abandon the standard, natural, explanation. It would be plausible only if there were one subjective experience, the signal man's, recounted to the narrator. But the three separate events are linked in a "paranormal causal chain": in his mind, the narrator assigns words to the gestures of a specter he has only heard about; when he arrives for the last time at the cutting, just after the signal man is killed, he sees the engine driver reenacting his part in the accident. The engine driver's gesticulations reproduce the specter's, while his words are those the narrator had privately assigned to the specter. The narrator's experience authenticates the signal man's, while the engine driver's authenticates both. Thus, the signal man's "encounters" with the specter logically acquire the status of precognition.

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Under this triple perspective, the specter is neither a natural nor a supernatural phenomenon. It is a prolepsis of the engine driver and a metonymy of the signal man's own death. The specter is authenticated as a paranormal phenomenon through the other characters' independent experiences, unremarkable individually, yet striking in conjunction with the signal man's. Dickens thus creates his brand of paranormal fiction by weaving together elements from the traditional fantastic (the authenticated mode, with the motif of the specter) and from mystery narratives, with their emphasis on clue gathering and hypothesizing.

Turgenev tried his hand at several modes of the fantastic, though "The Dream" stands out as the clearest instance of the paranormal. Here the narrator-protagonist's paranormal experience is private like the signal man's; but it is rendered by the experiencer himself in a subjective first-person narrative. The focus is shifted from epistemic to psychological and existential aspects: the effects of a clairvoyant dream on the protagonist-narrator's life. The sequence of events is triggered by a paranormal phenomenon, the narrator's recurrent dream of a man he senses is his father. His dream is precognitive, for the narrator will meet the stranger of his dreams and discover that the man is indeed his biological father. From the device of a dream that "comes true" is generated a narrative in which standard, rational logic is supplanted by and fused with oneiric logic.

The narrator describes himself as one given to reverie ("mechtatel' "); it is precisely such a "dreamer" for whom transcendence is possible because he does not restrict the natural domain to empirical sensory experience. Like other narrators of Turgenev's fantastic stories, he is psychologically predisposed towards his adventures. Dreaming in itself is neither supernatural nor paranormal, but Turgenev activates its potential paranormal power. Initially, the narrator is faced with two mysteries: what is the significance of his dream, and why is his mother constantly sad? The first begins to unravel when he encounters his "dream" father by chance. After speaking with the narrator, the man (who claims to be a baron) eludes him in the company of a Negro. The second mystery is resolved and linked to the first when, returning home, the narrator learns that a man of the baron's description had been seen running from the house. His mother's transparent story of a "friend" who was raped by an officer and later gave birth to a son confirms what the narrator's dream suggested: that the baron is his father. This "metabiological relationship" (Dessaix 106) is the genetic link that opens a channel between the narrator and his father. Through this channel, the narrator receives unexpected (and for some time unintelligible) information and "precognizes" an event he could not otherwise have foreseen.

A third mystery is shaped in the final episode of the story: inexplicably driven to track down his "dream" father, the narrator is led by an unknown force to a beach where first he finds the baron's corpse and later discovers it

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gone with no trace of footprints. His dreamlike experience of finding the corpse is supplemented and, at the same time, semantically transformed, by a piece of physical evidence on the baron's hand: a ring stolen from his mother when she was raped. Thus, while the clairvoyant dream couples the narrator with the baron, the ring (whose identity is confirmed by his mother) brings together the three participants in a paranormal configuration: mother and son coming from the natural domain, the father emerging from the oneiric. The ring is an empirical, determinate proof of the fusion of the natural and the supernatural. The mystery of the corpse's disappearance remains unsolved and leaves the story open-ended.

Maupassant's second version of "Le Horla" differs from "The Signal-Man" and "The Dream" by bringing into play the scientific theories of trans-sensory phenomena.[12] Private puzzles and their psychological consequences for the individual are superseded by broader philosophical concerns. "Le Horla" fictionalizes the terrifying prospect of humanity's loss of supremacy when faced with an imperceptible species. It is a purely subjective first-person narrative unmotivated by any external circumstance, an act of writing closest to confession and self-analysis. All the narrator's experiences are recorded in his diary, so that the events are immediate, almost simultaneous, with the act of narrating. The story follows a pattern of gradation: initially the narrator is merely uneasy, but then comes to sense something feeding on his vitality. Finally, he perceives the Horla in a mirror negatively as the obstruction of his own image.

By disposition, the narrator is no metaphysician or occultist and is forced to ferret out explanations only after the Horla's intrusion into his life. The narrator himself reports all the events and mediates interpretations from three sources: the monk's, Dr. Parent's, and his own. Each interpretation functions as a partial explanation for the narrator as part of a puzzle that he will ultimately piece together to form a new epistemology. The monk speaks of natural forces analogous to the wind that make their power felt even though they are unseen. Dr. Parent demonstrates not only how a person's will can be dominated under hypnosis, but how a hypnotized subject can see the invisible. The narrator's own interpretations follow the plot's gradation. He begins with natural explanations (illness, hallucination, madness) but abandons them as his experience intensifies. He then considers whether there exists a domain that cannot be perceived through the usual human sensory mechanisms. His final interpretation is provoked by a newspaper report about similar occurrences in Brazil: the Horla, he speculates, has been conveyed to France on the Brazilian schooner moored near his house. This last theory becomes a fanciful extension of Darwinism: the evolutionary process may not have ended with the emergence of humans, with all their sensory limitations. Open-ended evolution makes the appearance of a new and superior species entirely plausible; and from there it is only a step to the enslavement of humanity.

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These brief analyses of stories from three diverse literary cultures suggest that the paranormal mode has some universal features and yet lends itself to various sorts of imaginative modification. Dickens's, Turgenev's, and Maupassant's stories represent three distinct subtypes of paranormal fiction—the epistemic, the psychological, and the philosophical—a variability undoubtedly linked to specific features of each writer's oeuvre, to his artistic inclinations and stylistic individuality. But of course the three subtypes are only a sampling of the paranormal mode's historical changeability and capacity for variety. By the twentieth century, the paranormal mode had carried the fantastic through a period of skepticism, thanks to its aesthetic potential. And it did much more, I would argue: it sired the terrifying antiutopias of H. G. Wells and the oneiric fictional worlds of Franz Kafka.

Notes

[1] For a thorough discussion of Breitinger and the emergence of possible-worlds poetics, see Doležel, *Occidental Poetics* ch. 2.

[2] Jonathan Culler adroitly undermines Todorov's reliance on the reader's decision making: "It is not clear whether membership of a genre is determined by properties of the work which induce certain reactions on the part of readers—properties such as the presence or absence of naturalistic explanations—or whether genre is determined by the reaction of the reader, who might, for example, have missed a naturalistic explanation subtly outlined in the text" (58).

[3] Bessière borrows the terms "thetic" and "non-thetic" from Sartre's *L'imaginaire* (1940).

[4] For a discussion of modalities, see Doležel, "Narrative Worlds," and von Wright.

[5] See especially Pavel and Doležel, "Possible Worlds."

[6] "Physically possible" is not restricted to the actual world, but pertains to all the possible worlds where these laws apply. As Nicholas Rescher points out, "[l]aws, being hypothetical in nature, belong to the domain of possibility, and this domain is not finitized by the finitude of the actual" (48).

[7] I use the term "mode" in a typological sense, corresponding roughly to Northrope Frye's broad usage, though with a more specific aim. Frye's criterion—"the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" (33)—leads to a general classification of fictional modes (myth, romance, high mimetic, low mimetic, and ironic).

[8] Defined in Doležel, "Truth and Authenticity."

[9] In *Analytical Philosophy*, Arthur C. Danto introduces a "repertoire R of basic powers," which defines formally the natural capacity of "normal agents" to perform basic actions. Basic actions are distinguished from "miracles": "gods doing as basic actions what mere mortals must do as mediated ones" (125). A person with the power to foresee events—an ability outside the norm-defining R—would, in Danto's words, "almost certainly strike us as having *uncanny* cognitive powers" (129). The paranormal mode posits just such a modal enhancement by assuming that such powers are included in the repertoire R of some exceptional "mortals."

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[10] The paradox is that while the positivist epistemology represented the closed material world of secondary causes and natural laws, new scientific instruments and discoveries had in fact opened the world and would continue to do so.

[11] Psychical research may have "informed" paranormal fictions, yet fiction seems to have provided psychical research with some themes and narrative strategies. I would suggest that the intertextuality of the two discourses—of psychical research and of paranormal fictions—was reciprocal.

[12] The first version of "Le Horla" is a framed first-person narrative whose motivation is external to the events and made explicit in the frame. The secondary narrator, confined to a *maison de santé*, is reporting to a consortium of doctors an event which occurred a year before. The narrative takes the form of *plaidoyer*, a speech act aimed at explaining the speaker's beliefs and clearing him of the suspicion of insanity, but the pseudoscientific discourse robs it of immediacy.

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